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THE KATECHON IN THE AGE OF BIOPOLITICAL NIHILISM

Introduction

One of the most important contemporary developments in continental political thought is its 'messianic turn', associated with the work of Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, Jean Luc Nancy and Slavoj Zizek. Despite their enormous differences, these and other participants in this discussion all share a sense of exigency about the advent of a radically different world: the world of democracy to come, the coming community, the politics of truth, a new 'creation' of the world or emancipatory 'divine violence'. What constitutes these diverse orientations as messianic is less their relation to any historical tradition of messianism than this exigency that the potentiality of radical change be actualized. What this thought opposes is therefore not a purely secularist politics that would be wholly indifferent to the messianic, but another tradition, which is both aware and wary of the messianic event and seeks to delay its advent at all cost. Just as the contemporary messianic turn, which is strongly influenced by Pauline epistles, this tradition, which arguably continues to define the basic coordinates of Western politics, is also grounded in a particular interpretation of a (disputed) Pauline text, namely the passage in the Second Letter to the Thessalonians on the figure of the katechon.

As this article shall demonstrate, the passage on the katechon in 2 Thessalonians 2 is one of the most intensely political texts in the Western tradition and the conflict over its interpretation is similarly an intensely political struggle, at stake in which is the very existence of constituted power. Moreover, the significance of this text has little to do with a persistence of a vestige of the theological in modern politics. On the contrary, we shall argue that the logic of the katechon only fully comes into its own in the contemporary condition of biopolitical nihilism and any serious attempt to overcome this nihilism will therefore have to confront this logic. We shall begin by setting out two diametrically opposed approaches to the passage in a reading of Giorgio Agamben's critique of Carl Schmitt's interpretation of the katechon, demonstrating that this critique is not merely a matter of context-specific disagreement but rather exemplifies the fundamental division on the question of the political as such. In the following two sections we shall address the functioning of this concept in the contemporary context of biopolitics, devoid of the eschatological dimension. The reading of Paolo Virno's attempt at a positive revaluation of the katechon in the context of the naturalistic philosophical anthropology and Roberto Esposito's study of the immunitary orientation of modern politics will help us reconstruct the logic of the katechon in terms of the problem of the negation of negativity. In the fourth section we shall elaborate this logic in the analysis of Walter Benjamin's theory of baroque sovereignty and demonstrate that *pace* Schmitt the katechon does not function as a link between the political and the eschatological, but rather exists only as the severance of this link, whereby nihilism, as it were, theologizes itself. In the concluding section we shall return to Agamben's messianic interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2 and address the conditions for the fulfillment of the messianic exigency in the contemporary political terrain.

Schmitt and Agamben on 2 Thessalonians 2

What is the political significance of the Second Letter to the Thessalonians? In this letter, Paul (or perhaps his disciple) responds to the audience's agitation concerning the imminence of the Second Coming addressed in the First Letter, explaining the present withholding of *parousia* and elaborating the process by which it will eventually take place:

> Let no one deceive you in any way. Because it will not be unless the apostasy shall have come first, and the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction is revealed. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god and object of worship. As a result, he seats himself in the sanctuary of God and declares himself to be God. […] You know what it is that is now holding him back, so that he will be revealed when the time comes. For the mystery of anomy is already at work, but only until the person now holding him back (*ho katechon*) is removed. Then the lawless one (anomos) will be revealed, whom the Lord will abolish with the breath of his mouth, rendering him inoperative by the manifestation of his presence (*parousia*).[1]

Since the notion of the katechon does not occur anywhere else in the Scripture, the interpretation of this passage remains somewhat ambiguous, particularly with respect to what or who the katechon is and what its relation is to Antichrist (the 'lawless one'), whose revelation and abolition would pave the way for *parousia*.[2] According to Agamben, the tradition that identifies the katechon with the Roman Empire, endowing it with a positive function of delaying the end of time, begins with Tertullian. Schmitt's interpretation of the figure of the katechon in the *Nomos of the Earth* is a paradigmatic example of this tradition and unfolds in the context of his discussion of the medieval spatial order, out of whose dissolution the modern international law of the *Jus Publicum Europeaum*, which is the central

focus of the book, arose. The unity of this spatial order was guaranteed by the Holy Roman Empire, which is introduced by Schmitt as the first historical figure of the katechon and remains the only one that he considers at length:

> The Christian empire was not eternal. It always had its own end and that of the present eon in view. Nevertheless, it was capable of being a historical power. The decisive historical concept of this continuity was that of restrainer: katechon. 'Empire' in this sense meant the historical power to restrain the appearance of the Antichrist and the end of the present eon; it was a power that withholds, as the Apostle Paul said in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians. […] The empire of the Christian Middle Ages lasted only as long as the idea of the katechon was alive. [3]

For Schmitt, the understanding of the Empire in terms of the katechon provided a link between the eschatological promise of Christianity and the concrete experience of history, explaining the delay of *parousia* and giving meaning to historical and political action, which the imminence of *parousia* would devalue:

> I do not believe that any historical concept other than katechon would have been possible for the original Christian faith. The belief that a restrainer holds back the end of the world provides the only bridge between the notion of an eschatological paralysis of all human events and a tremendous historical monolith like that of the Christian empire of the German kings.[4]

Thus, for Schmitt the idea of the katechon made it possible simultaneously to endow Christianity with political form and significance and incorporate the pre-Christian forms of

political authority into the eschatological context of Christianity. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that Schmitt's articulation between eschatology and political history is only possible on the basis of historical developments centuries after the writing of the Letter: since Paul's text could not possibly refer to a *Christian* katechon, Schmitt's interpretation of the katechon necessarily breaks with the context of 2 Thessalonians 2.[5]

In the absence of this idea of the katechon, the political authority of the empire loses its concrete spatial unity and degenerates into pure 'Ceasarism', a 'typically non-Christian form of power': 'after the beginning of the 13th century this knowledge of the meaning of Christian history gradually disappeared. The great philosophical systems also destroyed the concrete sense of history and dissolved the historical manifestations of the struggle against heathens and non-believers into neutral generalizations.'[6] Thus, while Schmitt continued to apply the concept of the katechon in his discussion of modern politics, e.g. with reference to 19th century Britain,[7] these references are largely allegorical, since the concrete meaning of the concept is often difficult to recognize in them, the katechon itself becoming one more 'neutral generalization'. Indeed, this perception of the decline of the katechon helps us understand not only Schmitt's ambivalent relation to Christianity but also the formalism of Schmitt's own Weimar-era political theory, which conservative critics such as Leo Strauss accused of being precisely yet another neutral generalization.[8]

Even in its neutral allegorical form the concept of the katechon remains crucial for Schmitt in his post-Weimar 'concrete order thinking': 'I believe in the katechon; for me he is the sole possibility for a Christian to understand history and find it meaningful.'[9] In this staggering statement Schmitt explicitly proclaims as the object of his belief not a figure of the divine but rather the secular force that restrains the ultimate advent of the divine. What does it mean to *believe* in the katechon and how does this belief relate to the rather more familiar belief in God? In Agamben's argument, the belief in the katechon as a neutral generalization

characterizes every theory of the State, 'which thinks of it as a power destined to block or delay catastrophe'.[10] The 'neutral generalization' of the concept thus coincides with its secularization, which in Agamben's reading 'leaves intact the forces it deals with by simply moving them from one place to another. Thus, the political secularization of theological concepts (the transcendence of God as a paradigm of sovereign power) does nothing but displace the heavenly monarchy onto an earthly monarchy, leaving its power intact.'[11] In this neutral and general sense the katechon refers to any constituted authority, whose function is to delay the social catastrophe while simultaneously withholding a radical redemption from it. Every political theory that is grounded in a philosophical anthropology that posits human nature as inherently dangerous or even evil makes recourse to some form of the katechon as an agent of a civilizing 'denaturation' of the human condition.[12] The central figure in this secularization of the logic of the katechon is of course Thomas Hobbes, whose theory of sovereignty seeks precisely to ward off the anomic catastrophe of war of every man against every man, whose potentiality is inscribed in the state of nature. Hobbes's theory serves as a point of departure for Agamben's critique of the logic of sovereignty, a brief consideration of which will make intelligible his alternative reading of Paul's passage on the katechon.

In *Homo Sacer* Agamben argues that Hobbes's secularization of the katechon conceals the originary belonging of the anomic state of nature to the order of the commonwealth as its 'negative foundation'. The natural 'evil' that the sovereign is to restrain is neither spatially exterior nor temporally antecedent to the civil order, but is constituted within it in the manner of the state of exception, in which the order is treated as if dissolved (*tanquam dissoluta*).[13] 'Far from being a prejuridical condition that is indifferent to the law of the city, the Hobbesian state of nature is the exception and the threshold that constitutes and dwells within it. It is not so much a war of all against all, as, more precisely, a condition in which everyone is bare life and a *homo sacer* for everyone else.'[14] The state of nature is

constituted by the sovereign decision that, by treating the civil state as dissolved, suspends the operation of its internal laws and norms and thereby reduces the existence of its population to 'bare life'. In this condition, the covenant is treated as void and the subject is simultaneously abandoned *by* the sovereign, i.e. left without his protection, and abandoned *to* the sovereign's unlimited exercise of violence. If the state of nature is the product of the political, then the flaws and imperfections of the political, including the periodic or perpetual relapses into the state of exception, can by definition no longer be justified as 'lesser evils' in comparison with the 'return' to the state of nature, since they *are* nothing but this return itself. Agamben's critique of the philosophy of the political from Hobbes to Schmitt and beyond may thus be summed up in the claim that the 'lesser evil' of sovereignty is nothing less than Absolute Evil, since it is able to present itself as the Good despite being the origin of the very evil it struggles against.

This thesis guides Agamben's interpretation of the passage on the katechon in 2 Thessalonians 2. In *Time that Remains* Agamben asserts that rather than grounding something like a Christian 'doctrine of State power', this passage harbours no positive valuation of the katechon whatsoever, especially since the term could not possibly refer to Christian 'state power'. Indeed, in the above-cited fragment, the katechon is something that is to be 'removed' or taken 'out of the way' in order to reveal the 'mystery of anomie' that is 'already at work'. In Agamben's reading of Paul, anomie refers to the suspension of the law in the messianic state of exception (*katargesis*), whereby the law is rendered inoperative and remains in force without significance.[15] Insofar as this *katargesis* is not something perpetually to come but is 'already at work', the katechon as a structure of constituted authority originally represented by the Roman Empire merely defers the ultimate unveiling of the 'absence of law': 'The unveiling of this mystery entails bringing to light the inoperativity of the law and the substantial illegitimacy of each and every power in messianic time'.[16]

Similarly to his enfolding of Hobbes's state of nature back into the order of the commonwealth in the mode of the state of exception, Agamben's reading of Paul emphasises the way anomie is always already at work within the order of constituted power, which appropriates it and limits its use to the sovereign alone. Yet, if all power is illegitimate, then it is impossible to distinguish the katechon as a power that restrains anomie from the figure of the *anomos* that is conventionally held to refer to the Antichrist. Agamben proposes to conceive of the two figures as two aspects of one single power before and after the unveiling of the 'mystery of anomie': 'Profane power – albeit of the Roman empire or any other power – is the semblance that covers up the substantial lawlessness of messianic time. In solving the 'mystery', semblance is cast out and power assumes the figure of the *anomos*, of that which is the absolute outlaw.'[17]

This reading completely modifies the very terms, in which the problematic of the katechon is articulated. As we have seen, in the Hobbesian-Schmittian tradition the secularized katechon is legitimized as the only force that wards off the natural anomie and thus the end of the social order as we know it. The political, understood in terms of the sovereign decision on the friend-enemy distinction that restrains the extension of anomie to the entire existing order, is thus not merely grasped by analogy with the theological, as in Schmitt's *method* of political theology,[18] but is rather itself theologized as a transcendent foundation of political order so that Schmitt could indeed believe in the katechon without necessarily believing in God.

In contrast, Agamben's reading suggests that the katechon *is* the Antichrist that perpetuates its reign by concealing the fact of its long having arrived and pretending, as a 'lesser evil', to ward off its own advent. In this reading, the idea of the katechon is an insidious device, by which 'substantially illegitimate', anomic power perpetuates its reign, diverting the quest for redemption to the preoccupation with protection against the 'greater

evil' that requires obedience to the 'lesser' evil of constituted authority. It is precisely this survival of evil in the guise of a victory over it, whereby the Antichrist as katechon inserts itself between us and *parousia*, that constitutes what Paul calls the 'mystery' of anomie, which finds its ultimate resolution in the reappropriation of anomie by the messianic community. Against Schmitt's claim that the katechon serves as the link between Christian eschatology and authentic historical existence, founding and legitimizing the reign of the Empire, Agamben argues that the intention of the Letter is to affirm precisely this 'removal' of the katechon so that '2 Thess. 2 may not be used to found a 'Christian doctrine' of power in any manner whatsoever.'[19]

The diametrically opposed positions of Schmitt and Agamben on the katechon demonstrate the extreme political intensity of 2 Thessalonians 2 as one of the foundational texts of the Western political tradition. The relation to the katechon indicates nothing less than one's stand on the very question of the political and at least implicitly traverses every single problematic of political ontology, from natural law to contract theory, from the right of revolt to the war on terror. While for the Hobbesian-Schmittian orientation the restraining function of the katechon stabilizes the existing terrain of the political as 'all there is' and its disappearance is only thinkable as the self-destruction of humanity, Agamben's messianic approach insists on the removal of the katechon as the condition of possibility of life beyond the familiar coordinates of the political, defined by the logic of sovereignty.

While at first glance the obscure passage in Paul's Epistle would be of dubious relevance to contemporary politics, which no longer strives to establish a relation to eschatological transcendence and is content with purely immanentist management of people and things, this article shall demonstrate that the logic of the katechon has successfully reinstated itself in the problematics that appear furthest away from all things theological, e.g. the post-Foucauldian problematic of biopolitical governance. Moreover, the logic of the

katechon and even its explicit concept have found their way into the critical, 'radical-democratic' discourses that relentlessly battle the Hobbesian-Schmittian understanding of the political, in which this concept has been foundational. In the following section we shall address the recent reappraisal of the concept in the political theory of Paolo Virno, whose anti-statist orientation does not prevent a positive revaluation of the idea of the katechon in terms of the philosophical anthropology that has completely dispensed with theological transcendence.

The Katechon as a Historico-Natural Institution

In his radical-democratic theory of the multitude Paolo Virno attempts to dissociate the figure of the katechon from the sovereign power of the state.[20] Contrary to the prevailing tendency in today's critical thought Virno does not question the anthropological presuppositions of the Hobbesian-Schmittian tradition of the political but rather accepts from the outset that man is 'evil', 'problematic' or 'dangerous'.[21] Yet, the conclusions he draws from this acceptance are strikingly different: 'the risky instability of the human animal – so called *evil*, in sum – does not imply at all the formation and maintenance of that 'supreme empire' that is the sovereignty of the state.'[22]

Along the lines of Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology that influenced both Schmitt and Heidegger, Virno understands the human being as radically open and 'incomplete', lacking any determinate identity or vocation and hence defined solely by its possibilities, including the possibility to *negate* any determinate state of the world or the self. While these characteristics define the human being as capable of innovative action, creativity and the 'good life', they also make possible intense 'intra-species aggression': '[truly] radical evil is precisely and solely the evil that shares the same root as the good life.'[23] While the

Hobbesian-Schmittian tradition of the political finds in this radical ambivalence of the human being the justification for the establishment of political institutions that contain, limit or divert the dangers arising from human nature, Virno follows Agamben in arguing that these institutions *themselves* remain grounded in the state of nature as long as they retain the sovereign capacity to suspend the legal order in the state of exception: 'the state of exception, by subverting the pseudo-environmental uniformity assured by civil laws, restores the 'opening to the world' to its imponderable consequences. But it restores this opening, let us note, as an exclusive requisite of sovereignty.'[24]

While in the state of exception the natural powers of the human condition are restricted to the figure of the sovereign that functions as the remnant of the natural within the historical, Virno's democracy of the multitude rather consists in the appropriation by the multitude of its natural powers through the construction of 'historico-natural' institutions that make possible the concrete historical application of the ambivalent potentialities of the human condition in the acts of speech and praxis. The katechon is presented by Virno as the paradigm of such an institution, a force that restrains natural evil, keeps it at bay, without being able to expunge or defeat it. This force 'remains close' to the evil that it restrains and 'does not even avoid mingling with it', 'adhering to chaos' that it resists: the katechon 'safeguards the 'radical evil' that it has engendered: the antidote here is no different from the poison.'[25] Virno dismisses Schmitt's reduction of the katechon to the state and proposes to view it as a 'bioanthropological constant',[26] an innate apotropaic function that seeks to preserve the natural forces against complete self-destruction through their own unhindered operation: 'if [the katechon] limits aggression, it gets in the way of having this aggression annihilated once and for all.'[27] Moreover, in its protection of these natural forces the katechon can draw on nothing other than these forces themselves: '[the] (auto)destructive drives connected to the opening to the world can be confronted thanks only to the same bio-

linguistic conditions that are the foundation and guarantee of this opening.'[28] Virno's katechon is thus an institution that protects human nature *from* itself, *for* itself and *by* itself.

By dissociating the katechon from the idea of transcendence Virno dissolves the link that Schmitt's reading establishes between sovereign power and the eschatological dimension. While for Schmitt the obscurity of the eschaton entails a neutralization of the power of the katechon, Virno's theory rather points to a puzzling resilience of the logic of the katechon in the symbolic universe, from which every idea of transcendence appears to be evacuated.

> [Katechon], a radically anti-eschatological and theologico-political concept, is opposed to the 'end of the world', or, better yet, to the atrophy of the opening to the world. […] Both victorious evil and complete victory over evil lead to the same end, that is to say, to the state of atrophy. By placing itself in opposition to danger and also to the elimination of that danger, to the Antichrist and also to the Messiah, the katechon delays the end of the world. Katechon not only oscillates between the negative and the positive, without ever expunging the negative; it also safeguards the state of oscillation and its persistence as such.[29]

This description of the katechon as an immanent force of deferral evidently resonates with Derrida's logic of *diffèrance,* the quasi-transcendental force of constitutive and constantly renewed deferral that makes the eschaton or simply the end of anything radically inaccessible.[30] As the cure against poison that consists in the introjection of the poison itself, the katechon epitomizes the notion of the *pharmakon* in Derrida's reading of Plato.[31] However, whereas Derrida deployed this logic to destabilize institutional structures, Virno affirms it as an institutional alternative to the Hobbesian-Schmittian tradition of the political.

It is nonetheless easy to demonstrate that this immanentist version of the katechon remains within the orbit of the tradition it criticizes.

'Victorious evil' and 'complete victory over evil' can only be posited as identical if we understand *parousia* as completely immanent to this world. Only if the *eschaton* refers nowhere but back to the world itself may the 'end of the world' be approached as equivalent to the victory of worldly forces that retain their potentiality for evil. Yet, in this case, it would be impossible to speak of any 'atrophy' or 'entropy', let alone of the closure of the human 'opening to the world', since it is precisely this opening that would be victorious in the *parousia*. Indeed, Agamben's reinterpretation of Pauline messianism approaches *parousia* in this minimalist manner as the reappropriation of the general anomie that already characterizes the human condition but is concealed by the presence of the katechon. Agamben's understanding of redemption in terms of the appropriation of the sheer facticity of existence that he terms 'the irreparable' rejects any attempt to found politics and social life on the transcendence of nature and instead affirms a rethought figure of human life devoid of all separations and negativity: 'the life that begins on Earth after the last day is simply human life.'[32] For Agamben, then, the fact that the victory of evil and the victory over it are one and the same would merely indicate the need to get the katechon that blocks this possibility of victory 'out of the way'. In contrast, for Virno the katechon, no longer taking the form of the sovereign state, continues to function as the restrainer of the Antichrist, who in his naturalistic theory cannot be anyone other than *ourselves* in our species-specific ambivalence.

In this insistence on the restraining force of the katechon Virno is much closer to the Hobbesian-Schmittian tradition than he cares to admit. As a restrainer of the constitutive ambivalence of the human condition, the katechon stands opposed to two extreme possibilities: the anarchic potentiality of the 'state of nature', devoid of any positive rules that rein in the natural regularity of species-specific behaviours, and the constituted order, whose

positive rules trample, distort or simply ignore this regularity. Its function is to mediate between rules and regularity, ordering the anarchic state of nature yet at the same time 'naturalizing' this order by returning it to the anthropological conditions of its possibility.

However, isn't this *exactly* what the Hobbesian-Schmittian sovereign power does? Through its potentiality for self-suspension in the state of exception, the sovereign state ensures the existence of the link between law and life, norm and fact, etc., and only in this manner may it claim to mitigate, restrain or control the anarchic potentialities of the natural state of humanity. Just as Virno's katechon, sovereign power 'gives evidence to the relation between regularity and rules, or to the intertwining of natural life and political praxis'.[33] Yet, while the logic of sovereignty does so by the appropriation of natural powers that are then deployed to exercise power *over* the same natural powers of the subjects, thus instantiating history as a partial transcendence of nature, the multitude in Virno's analysis, which resonates with the more familiar work of Hardt and Negri,[34] reclaims these powers in order to govern *itself* in a democracy of pure immanence, a 'historico-natural reality, [which] exhibits, in its very mode of being, the peculiar historical situation in which all the distinctive traits of human nature have earned an immediate political relevance'.[35]

Nonetheless, this post-sovereign democracy is a far cry from any utopia of anarchic bliss, since the function of the katechon is now taken up by the multitude itself, which restrains and inhibits the negative aspects of the human condition. Yet, the only resources that it has at its disposal are these very negative aspects themselves. For example, the faculty of negation, whose 'evil' character is best exemplified by the human capacity to refuse recognition to another member of the species, is tamed by the possibility to negate this very negation and thus allow for reciprocal recognition. We may therefore define the function of the katechon as a *double negation* or, more precisely, the negation of the originary negativity of the human condition. The democracy of the multitude consists in the ceaseless work of

negating its own negativity, immunizing itself against its own danger to itself, '[providing] protection by making use of the same conditions that give birth to danger'.[36]

While Virno offers his version of the katechon as a model of anti-statist politics, his understanding of politics in terms of 'experimenting with new and more effective ways of negating negation'[37] is functionally indistinct from the Hobbesian-Schmittian tradition that he opposes. In fact, Virno's idea of immunization resonates with the political philosophy of Roberto Esposito, for whom the 'immunitary paradigm' provides a key to the understanding of the biopolitical turn in modern politics, inaugurated precisely by Hobbes. Yet, as the following section shall demonstrate, despite Virno's enthusiastic embrace of Esposito's notion,[38] Esposito does not propose the katechonic logic of immunity as a solution to the problem of sovereign power but rather posits it as the very origin of this problem.

The Katechon and the Aporia of Immunity

Esposito's concept of immunity, central to his theory of biopolitics, refers to the logic of exemption or separation that protects individual identity from its total dispersion into or expropriation by the common. To be immune is to be free from the communal obligation of reciprocity, to enjoy autonomy in relation to community.[39] Immunity presupposes community and seeks to protect it from the total dissolution of individuality but it only does so by injecting the community with its own negation. It is this immunitary logic that accounts for the specificity of modern biopolitics: while politics has always and everywhere been concerned with the defense of life in various ways, in Western modernity immunity has become the essence of politics and accounts for its aporetic character.

The notion of immunity permits Esposito to connect the two aspects of biopolitics that made Michel Foucault's original articulation of the concept so ambiguous and subsequently

launched two divergent theories: Agamben's 'negative' biopolitics of exclusion and destruction of 'bare life' and Negri's affirmative biopolitics of immaterial labour and the immanent democracy of the multitude. For Esposito, biopolitics is always *both* negative and positive, destructive and productive, objectifying and subjectifying. These antinomic aspects are articulated by the principle of immunity, whereby life is protected negatively, i.e. by means of the introjection of very negativity that it is protected *from*. 'Just as in the medical practice of vaccinating the individual body, so the immunization of the political body functions similarly, introducing within it a fragment of the same pathogen from which it wants to protect itself, by blocking and contradicting natural development.'[40] The immunitary logic of modernity, whose genealogy Esposito traces from Hobbes through Hegel and Nietzsche to the philosophical anthropology of Scheler and Plessner, rethinks negativity as the productive impulse of life, constitutive of human existence as radically open and potential, risky and dynamic. Virno's emphasis on the radical ambivalence of the human condition that harbours evil within itself belongs squarely to this immunitary trajectory. His insistence on the apotropaic function of the katechon is therefore part of the modern political tradition that focuses on the protection of life from itself and constructs a series of artificial structures that save life from its natural dangers. For Esposito, sovereignty, liberty and property are precisely such mediating institutions oriented towards the negative protection of the immediacy of life. It is easy to observe the aporetic character of this project: '[the] pretense of responding to an immediacy is contradictory to the mediations', which end up 'rebounding against their own proper meanings, twisting against themselves'.[41]

The Hobbesian logic of sovereignty, whose secularization of the logic of the katechon we have addressed above, offers the most striking expression of this aporia. In the state of nature any attempt to protect life poses a threat to it, insofar as the fundamental equality among human beings in this state presupposes an equal capacity for killing and being killed.

The natural immunity of the human being, its drive for self-preservation, is therefore insufficient and must be supplemented by an 'induced' artificial immunity that both negates the former and realizes its goal. 'In order to save itself, life needs to step out from itself and constitute a transcendental point from which it receives orders and shelter.'[42] Yet, the sovereign figure that occupies this transcendental point is simultaneously nothing other than the element of that very 'life' and 'nature' that it is meant to protect. In full accordance with Virno's notion of the katechon as a 'historico-natural' institution, the Hobbesian sovereign is constituted by the self-negation of nature, which preserves itself by separating itself from itself and redoubling itself as artifice. The sovereign power of the katechon may thus be defined as an *immanent transcendence* of nature, which can only relate to life in a negative manner, since it is itself the product of life's self-negation. At the same time, this negativity is nothing other than the force of life itself, which has been artificially separated from the natural condition and presents itself as its transcendence.

Derrida's notion of the supplement succinctly sums up the paradox of the immanent transcendence of the katechon: in its attempt to 'supply what is lacking' (the restraint of natural negativity), the katechon is inevitably driven to 'replace', with the effects of its own interventions, the very nature it intended to 'complete'.[43]. While Derrida's argument has more often been deployed in the mode of a de-naturalizing critique, which exposes supplementary artifice in every pretense to natural authenticity, the direction of criticism may easily be reversed to demonstrate that this artifice itself has no other origin than the nature it supplements. The katechon is a part of nature that posits a lack (negativity) in nature that it protects it from by injecting nature with the excess of negativity, whose origin can only be natural as well. Thus, contrary to Virno's enthusiastic embrace of katechonic mediation between nature and history, Esposito argues that this immunitary paradigm is inherently countereffective due to its logical structure of the double negation:

> Immunity, because it is secondary and derivative with respect to the force that it is intent on fighting, always remains subaltern to it. Immunity negates the power of negation, at least what it considers as such. Yet it is precisely because of this that immunity continues to speak the language of the negative, which it would like to annul: in order to avoid a potential evil it produces the real one; it substitutes an excess with a defect, a fullness with an emptiness, a plus with a minus, negating what it affirms and so doing affirming nothing other than its negation.[44]

This aporia of the negation of nihilism reaches its extreme point in Nazi biopolitics, which renounces the logic of mediation and applies its politics to life directly: 'What before had always been a vitalist metaphor becomes a reality in Nazism.'[45] Yet, despite this radical difference, which in Esposito's argument places Nazism outside the Western political tradition,[46] Nazism persists in the same nihilistic paradigm of immunization, which articulates the therapeutic intention of the social policy of the regime with its genocidal outcome: 'it is only by killing as many people as possible that one could heal those who represented the true Germany.'[47] The extremity of the Nazi genocide, whose suicidal climax was reached in Hitler's 1945 Demolition Order which exposed to death the very population that the genocide sought to protect, is not a perversion of the immunitary paradigm, but rather its logical conclusion, whereby the immunitarian logic folds back on itself in an auto-immune manner: '[Nazism] strengthened its own immunitary apparatus to the point of remaining victim to it. The only way for an individual or collective organism to save itself definitely from the risk of death is to die.'[48]

From this perspective, the genocidal violence of Nazism has nothing to do with the absence of a restraining katechonic function. On the contrary, the genocide was in itself an

exercise of the restraining force of the katechon (the Nazi party-state), which first made biology the sole object of its protection and then sought to restrain the degenerate negativity it quite unsurprisingly found everywhere in the biological substance of the population. If the danger happens to be everywhere, then the restraining response of the katechon must similarly be total. Moreover, since the katechon derives the means of protection from the very condition it protects from, these means can only be negative. Thus, the restraining actions of the katechon logically take the form of *total negation*. The sole difference of Nazism from the more moderate versions of the modern katechon consists in its construction of human nature, whose potential for evil is to be restrained, in strictly biological terms. Yet, this shift from the metaphorical to the literal and from mediation to the immediate takes place within the nihilistic coordinates of the logic of immunization, which alone makes this shift intelligible as an expression of an exasperated attempt to escape the aporia of the negative protection of life.

Thus, it is the condition of nihilism that brings immunitary biopolitics into being as an attempt to resolve the problem of how to negate negativity. While the Schmittian understanding of the katechon conceives of it as the point of articulation between the historical and the eschatological, our identification of the katechonic function with the immunitary politics of modern nihilism demonstrates that this articulation is purely negative and consists entirely in the fissure itself. It is precisely by obscuring the eschatological dimension that constituted powers of modern nihilism are able to theologize themselves as transcendent in relation to the realm of immanence they necessarily arise from. The reason why Schmitt could *believe* in the katechon is that it is indeed an *idol* that fills the eschatological void of modern nihilism. In the following section we shall elaborate this paradoxical status of the katechon in a brief analysis of Walter Benjamin's theory of baroque sovereignty.

Between Nature and History

The problem of nihilism is central to Esposito's paradigm of immunization, not merely with regard to its internal logic of the negation of negativity, but also with regard to the temporal context of its emergence. Contrary to Schmitt, who inferred from the eclipse of eschatology the decline of the katechon, the logic of katechonic immunization was only able to dominate the entire political terrain in the nihilistic condition of modernity, 'when the mechanisms of defense that had up until that moment constituted the shell of symbolic protection began to weaken, beginning with the transcendental perspective linked to a theological matrix. […] Modern man needs a series of immunitary apparatuses that are intended to protect a life that has been completely given over to itself when the secularization of religious meaning takes place.'[49] This thesis finds a brilliant illustration in Walter Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, which in Agamben's reading is an esoteric critical response to Schmitt's theory of sovereignty.[50] In *Political Theology* Schmitt goes beyond his earlier theorization of sovereignty in *Die Diktatur* as split between the poles of law-preserving power (commissarial dictatorship) or law-making power (sovereign dictatorship) and famously identifies sovereignty with the decision on the exception that suspends the operation of existing law in the manner analogous to the miracle in theology.[51] In his history of the Baroque *Trauerspiel* Benjamin initially adopts the same concept of sovereignty, yet proceeds to deconstruct it, presenting the baroque sovereign as the figure constitutively incapable of any decision.

Benjamin's point of departure in his analysis of the *Trauerspiel* is the transformation in the perception of temporality in the baroque age due to the eclipse of the eschatological dimension and the consequent blurring of the distinction between history and nature, whereby the '[constantly] repeated drama of the rise and fall of princes appeared as the natural aspect of the course of history, essential in its permanence'.[52] As Michel Foucault has argued in his

genealogy of modern governmentality, the temporality of the period is indefinite, lacking both an origin and, more importantly for our purposes, an endpoint: 'There is nothing like a dream of the last Empire that dominated medieval religious and historical perspectives. […] We now find ourselves in a perspective in which historical time is indefinite, in a perspective of indefinite governmentality with no foreseeable term or final aim.'[53] In this indefinite time without origin or end, the eschatological dimension is blocked and the historical world is perceived as 'nature deprived of grace'.[54] This 'state of nature' has nothing to do with a pre-historic innocence, either idyllic or savage, but is solely the effect of the decay and decomposition of eschatological historicity:

> The religious man of the baroque era clings so tightly to the world because of the feeling that is being driven with it toward a cataract. The baroque knows no eschatology, and for that very reason it possesses no mechanism by which all earthly things are gathered together and exalted before being consigned to their end. The hereafter is emptied of everything which contains the slightest breath of this world.[55]

In this world of history-become-nature transcendence is emptied of any possible content but remains present as an 'ultimate heaven', a 'vacuum' that is capable of one day 'destroying the world with catastrophic violence'.[56] It is from this perspective that we should understand Benjamin's minimal yet profound amendment to Schmitt's definition of sovereignty: 'the baroque concept emerges from a discussion of the state of emergency and makes it the most important function of the prince to exclude this.'[57] While Schmitt's sovereign consummates his power by deciding on the exception and thus bringing it into being in the manner of the miracle, Benjamin's baroque sovereign is rather faced with a more

prosaic yet also more difficult task of excluding the exception, which has already taken place and even become the rule.

It is here that we encounter the figure of the katechon. As Agamben argues in his reading of the Benjamin-Schmitt debate, the evacuation of the eschatological dimension ruptures the systematic analogy that Schmitt's political theology established between the sovereign and God.[58] The baroque sovereign is in contrast defined precisely by having nothing to do with divinity: 'However highly he is enthroned over subject and state, his status is confined to the world of creation; he is the lord of creatures but he remains a creature.'[59] To rule over creatures while remaining a creature is precisely the function of immanent transcendence, the separation of nature from itself that has been highlighted in various ways by Agamben, Esposito and Virno. Indeed, the baroque sovereign is a perfect example of Virno's historico-natural institution, since it deploys its powers, drawn from nature, to restrain the negativity of natural forces.

Yet, how can the baroque sovereign do that? It is clear that insofar as the eschaton is empty, the victory of natural 'evil' (the secular Antichrist) has already taken place and takes the form of the state of exception. To the extent that the sovereign is a lord of creatures that is itself a creature it is necessarily itself contaminated by this natural evil. Hence, the only possible task of the baroque sovereign *qua* katechon is to persevere in its own being without being consumed by the very state of exception it is always already caught up in and, literally, consists of. By injecting the natural negativity of existence with the induced negativity of rule, the sovereign immunizes itself against the dangers of the very forces its own being is composed of. What the katechon must protect in the age of nihilism is primarily *itself*.

Faced with the task of self-preservation in the naturalized state of exception, the sovereign seeks to accumulate as much power as possible and in this manner becomes a *tyrant*, lacking anything like a restraining function, including the function of self-restraint.

From the outset, the tyrant acts on the basis of hubris, as a 'deranged creation', 'erupting into madness like a volcano and destroying himself and his entire court'.[60] Similarly to Esposito's idea of Nazism as an exasperated hyper-immunization that ends up destroying what it meant to protect, the tyrant's violence injects limitless negativity into the existing order, ultimately undermining the tyrant's own existence, which is after all as natural as that of the subjects over which it reigns. Falling victim to the 'disproportion between the unlimited hierarchical dignity with which he is divinely invested and the humble estate of his humanity',[61] the fearful tyrant is at the permanent risk of turning into a pitiful *martyr*.

There is only one possibility to exit the endless oscillation between tyranny and martyrdom in the structure of baroque sovereignty, which consists in the transformation of the sovereign into the intriguer (*Intrigant*). Contrary to the tyrant, who violently tries to exclude the state of exception and falls victim to it, the intriguer, usually represented in the Baroque drama by the servant to the prince, is perfectly aware that the state of exception is all there is and rather than vainly attempt to exclude it he tries to make use of it through ceaseless plotting and scheming.[62] While the baroque sovereign begins by attempting to enact, in its own person, the immanent transcendence of nature, which entangles it in the tyrannical hubris, the intriguer renounces all transcendence in favour of a purely immanent governance by staging plots and conspiracies, which, in accordance with the general reduction of history to nature, are grounded in the 'anthropological, even physiological knowledge' of human beings and the virtuous manipulation of natural human forces.[63] 'The intriguer exploits mechanisms of human action as the result of forces over which there can be no ultimate control, but which can therefore be made the subject of probabilistic calculations.'[64]

It is easy to recognize in this 'rule by intrigue' an *Urform* of what Foucault termed governmentality,[65] whose genealogy is traced back precisely to the indefinite temporality of

the baroque age that gives rise to the administrative state and the doctrine of *raison d'etat*, whose mutation in the late 18th-early 19th centuries leads to liberal biopolitical rule.[66] While immanentist biopolitical government deploys its knowledge of human nature for the purposes of ordering human existence, directing and optimizing the development of biological forces, the sovereign intriguer relies on the same knowledge in conspiratorial plotting, whose purpose is *destabilization* in the interest of its own self-preservation, the management of the state of exception that no longer seeks to exclude it but solely to enhance one's own standing within it.[67] This split of government into biopolitical management and sovereign scheming, which we may observe everywhere around us, defines the entire space of modern politics, insofar as its eschatological horizon continues to be blocked.

Any political discourse that ventures beyond this narrow repertoire must first recover the question of redemption, as Agamben does in his messianic reading of Paul.[68] Nonetheless, while Paul's strategy of the generalized *katargesis* of all constituted power is animated by the promise of the Second Coming, in the context of contemporary nihilism no theological solution, of the kind offered by John Milbank's 'radical orthodox' reading of Paul, appears adequate to the task. Any exit from nihilism *back* into a 'restored ontology of undying life' can be undertaken only in bad faith, which, moreover, appears to lead not to the removal but the reconciliation with the katechon as a temporary figure of the reign of the second-best, however 'ambiguous' or 'daemonic'.[69] Yet, neither is it a matter of the Derridean perpetual deferral of *parousia* as something 'to come' without ever actually arriving – a messianism that Agamben termed 'thwarted' and 'paralyzed'.[70] While Milbank's reading of Paul leaps too quickly into counterfactual transcendence, Derrida's messianism remains suspended in the state of nature deprived of grace, in which nothing can ever really come to an end.[71]

In contrast to both Milbank and Derrida, what Agamben's messianism affirms is the minimalist if not outright empty understanding of *parousia* that should nonetheless be held

rigorously distinct from its absence. We can never go back on nihilism and its naturalization of history but it does not follow from this that the horizon of redemption itself is to be annulled. What can be mobilized against the nihilistic reign of the katechon is the vacuity of the eschaton itself, 'the perfectly empty sky of humanity' that Agamben calls the 'irreparable'.[72] The *parousia* that the katechons of our time delay is nothing more but nothing less than human life as such in its integral form, no longer separated between nature and history, fact and norm, life and law, but, wholly contained in 'speech and praxis that have become transparent to themselves'.[73] The question we shall address in the final section is how the katechonic restraint on this integral form of life may be removed.

How to Get the Katechon Out of the Way

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that the concept of the katechon is not an obscure remnant of premodern politics but rather a paradigmatic example of the biopolitical logic of modern nihilism, characterized by the indefinite temporality of natural history. As a figure of constituted authority, the katechon is always already part of the natural anomie that it tries to restrain through artificial immunitary mechanisms of security, which, drawing for their resources on the very negativity that they are to confront, only succeed in exacerbating this negativity, perpetually threatening autoimmune self-destruction. The messianic project of the removal of the katechon must therefore respond to a double challenge: how to overcome the immanent transcendence of the katechon without persisting in the vicious circle of the negation of negativity.

The solution to the first problem is quite easily inferred from the logical structure of the concept of the katechon as immanent transcendence. The katechon constitutes itself by separating the generalized anomie of the human condition from itself. It is only by

expropriating the anomie inherent in social praxis itself and containing it within an institution with claims to transcendence that the katechon emerges as a paradoxical power of evil over evil, which protects life by annihilating it and ensures order by suspending it. Yet, as we have seen, the claim of this power to transcendence is merely virtual, since it is impossible for a createrly lord of creatures to ever fully escape the terrain of natural immanence. The removal of the katechon thus calls for the return of this virtual and symbolic authority to the natural immanence, whose transcendence it vainly attests to. This return to immanence that Agamben has addressed in terms of profanation should be rigorously distinguished from the revolutionary strategy of seizing and reclaiming the transcendence of sovereignty and the anarchist strategy of abolishing this transcendence as such.[74] The target of this operation is not a particular institutional structure (e.g. the state) but the katechonic function of the transcendence of nature. While our political imagination is today more attuned to the critique of naturalizations of all kinds, which finds the mediated and the constructed beneath every claim to natural immediacy, what is at stake here is the diametrically opposite strategy of the naturalization of the symbolic power of the katechon, a purposeful reification of the authority that can only exist as virtual and abstract. The messianic state of exception is thus produced by emptying out transcendence back into immanence, the *kenosis* of the katechon into the state of exception it can no longer exclude.

Although necessary, the strategy of kenosis into immanence is not sufficient, since, as we have seen, immanence is where the katechon arises from as an apotropaic institution designed to protect this immanence from the negativity at its heart. As Virno reminds us, the power of negation required for this operation belongs to our natural powers that would reign unlimited in the purely immanentist society. This is why it would be far too simple to oppose the sovereign state with the immanentist self-governance of the multitude, seeking a way out of biopolitics through a reinvention of the *polis*. The entire discourse of 'self-government', in

all its versions from conservative communitarianism to councilist communism, must be problematized. We are therefore back to the problem of the negation of negativity whose resolution is the condition for any genuine move outside the vicious circle of immunitary nihilism.

The resolution of this problem proceeds through the suspension of the apotropaic logic that generates the immanent transcendence of the katechon. What is at stake in Agamben's minimalist version of messianism is no longer saving life from itself, transcending it in order to delay its self-destruction, but rather reclaiming the transcendence of the world itself as our ethos: 'At the point you perceive the irreparability of the world, at that point it is transcendent.'[75] This irreparable world is of course nothing other than the natural ambivalence of the human condition, which, from Hobbes to Virno, demands protection for and from itself. In contrast, for Agamben messianic redemption has nothing to do with the attainment of security: 'Redemption is not an event, in which what was profane becomes sacred and what was lost is found again. Redemption is, on the contrary, the irreparable loss of the lost, the definitive profanity of the profane.'[76] Contrary to Virno's criticism of messianic politics as a quest for perfection that destroys the natural imperfection of the human condition, Agamben's messianism consists precisely in the appropriation of our imperfection or impropriety as the sole content of the proper and the perfect.

At first glance, this idea of redemption seems to be a particularly arcane version of Romantic naturalism. Yet, if we cannot overcome biopolitics by building a new *polis*, neither can we do so by unproblematically withdrawing into the natural immanence of life. In fact, it is precisely the impossibility of anything like a *choice* between history and nature that conditions the overcoming of the logic of the katechon. Since it is precisely the katechon that ensures the perpetuation of the historical dimension in a degraded state of aimless persistence in time by delaying the resolution of the 'mystery of anomie', its removal entails a veritable

end of history, which is the permanent theme of Agamben's thought.[77] Yet, insofar as *parousia* no longer reveals anything other than the irreparability of the world, this end of history does not inaugurate a new condition but only marks the return of history itself to nature, its decomposition and ruin under the 'perfectly empty' sky. The end of history in the sense of the suspension of attempts to transcend nature simultaneously marks the end of nature as the fictitious locus of extra-historical plenitude. Thus, it is neither history that is saved from nature through its immanent transcendence nor nature that is saved from history through a return to the pre-historical immanence. What is saved and let be is rather the potentiality of existence in the zone of indistinction between history and nature, 'where history merges with the setting'.[78]

A politics based on a messianic re-interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2 is therefore the very opposite of utopianism, promising no bright future but only the reappropriation of the existent: 'everything will be as is now, just a little different.'[79] The little difference that makes *all* the difference is that this irreparable world would be truly and fully *ours*, no longer fractured by negativity and deferral but wholly available for use in social praxis, habitual action that constitutes our second nature.

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[2] For theological interpretations of the Letter see e.g. Ernest Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), Ivor H. Jones, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2005).

[3] Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 60. For other references to the katechon in Schmitt's texts see *Land and Sea* (Washington DC: Plutarch Press, 1997), 8, 43; *Political Theology II*: *The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 92. In his late writings Schmitt designated numerous institutions and persons as the katechons of their time (the Jesuit Order, Emperor Franz Joseph, *Jus Publicum Europeaum*, Masaryk, Pilsudski, etc.) yet this designation arguably remained allegorical. See e.g. Wolfgang Palaver, 'Carl Schmitt on Nomos and Space', *Telos* 106 (1996), 123-124; Heinrich Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction between Political Theology and Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 158-166.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Cf. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 2002), 224.

[6] Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 63.

[7] Ibid., 238.

[8] See Leo Strauss, 'Comments on Carl Schmitt's *Der Begriff Des Politischen*' in Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*' (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976), 103; Palaver, 'Carl Schmitt on Nomos and Space', 105-127; Mika Ojakangas, *A Philosophy of Concrete Life: Carl Schmitt and the Political Thought of Late Modernity* (Jyvaskyla: Sophi, 2004), 141-150.

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[14] Ibid., 105-106.

[15] Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 95-101.

[16] Ibid., 111.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Cf. Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985).

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[20] Paolo Virno, *Multitude between Innovation and Negation* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2008), 45.

[21] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 58-66.

[22] Virno, *Multitude*, 16.

[23] Ibid., 21.

[24] Ibid., 31.

[25] Ibid., 56, 189.

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[27] Ibid., 59.

[28] Ibid., 60.

[29] Ibid., 60-61.

[30] Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 1-28.

[31] Derrida, *Disseminations* (London: Athlone, 1981), 61-172.

[32] Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 7.

[33] Virno, *Multitude*, 61.

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[35] Virno, *Multitude*, 64.

[36] Virno, *Multitude*, 54.

[37] Ibid., 190.

[38] See ibid., 60.

[39] Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 50-51.

[40] Ibid., 46.

[41] Ibid., 56.

[42] Ibid., 58.

[43] See Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 145-146.

[44] Esposito, *Bios*, 92.

[45] Ibid., 112.

[46] See Esposito, 'Totalitarianism and Biopolitics? Concerning a Philosophical Interpretation of the Twentieth Century', *Critical Inquiry*, 34 (2008), 640.

[47] Esposito, *Bios*, 115.

[48] Ibid., 138. See also Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 33-37.

[49] Ibid., 54.

[50] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 2003). For a detailed discussion of the Benjamin-Schmitt debate see Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 53-57; Samuel Weber, 'Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt', *Diacritics* 22 (3-4) (1992), 5-18; Horst Bredekamp, 'From Walter Benjamin to Carl Schmitt, via Thomas Hobbes', *Critical Inquiry* 25 (1999), 247-266.

[51] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 13-32, 35-63. Cf. Schmitt, *Die Diktatur* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1994).

[52] Benjamin, *The Origin*, 88.

[53] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 260.

[54] Benjamin, *The Origin*, 81.

[55] Ibid., 66. In *State of Exception* Agamben contested the conventional version of this fragment, arguing that Benjamin's editors have erroneously replaced the original 'there is a baroque eschatology' (*Es gibt eine barocke Eschatologie*) by 'there is no baroque eschatology' (*Es gibt keine barocke Eschatologie*), distorting the meaning of the text. In Agamben's reading, Benjamin's point is precisely that the baroque age knows an eschaton, but this eschaton is wholly immanent to this world, consigning the world 'to an absolutely empty sky' (Agamben, *State of Exception*, 57). The plausibility of Agamben's correction is somewhat tempered, since he does not consider another occasion on which the absence of eschatology is invoked in Benjamin's text: '[Consequent] upon the total disappearance of eschatology is the attempt to find, in a reversion to a bare state of creation, consolation for the renunciation of a state of grace.' (Benjamin, *The Origin*, 81, see also the passage on the 'rejection of eschatology' on the same page). On the other hand, Agamben's correction does not entirely modify the conventional reading but rather adds an insightful nuance to it: the

vacuity of the eschaton is not the same as its absence, as the 'white eschatology' without any content persists in this world and configures it as a permanent state of exception, a site of 'catastrophe' (ibid., 66).

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 55.

[58] Agamben, *State of Exception*, 57.

[59] Benjamin, *The Origin*, 85.

[60] Benjamin, *The Origin*, 70.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 88.

[63] Ibid., 95.

[64] Weber, 'Taking Exception', 12.

[65] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 87-133.

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[67] Benjamin, *The Origin*, 96. See also Weber, 'Taking Exception', 17.

[68] See also Alain Badiou, *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Slavoj Zizek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003).

[69] John Milbank, 'Paul against Biopolitics', *Theory, Culture and Society* 25 (7-8) (2008), 161, 159.

[70] See Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1991), 39; *State of Exception*, 64; *The Time that Remains*, 102.

[71] Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 1994), 15-38, 56-74.

[72] Agamben, *Idea of Prose* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 82.

[73] Agamben, *Language and Death*, 106.

[74] Agamben, *Profanations*, 73-92.

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[76] Ibid., 102.

[77] See e.g. Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 109-111; *Language and Death*, 49-53, 99-101; *Homo Sacer*, 60-62; *The Time that Remains*, 99-103.

[78] Benjamin, *The Origin*, 92.

[79] Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 57.